

# NIFC News

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## **Australian, New Zealand Wildfire Specialists to Assist U.S. Efforts**

(Boise, Idaho) – Nearly 50 fire specialists from Australia and New Zealand will arrive at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise today, eventually bound for fire assignments throughout the Northwest and Rocky Mountain areas.

Fifteen of the specialists are helicopter managers and 26 will assist in mid-level fireline management roles, including strike team and task force leaders. Five liaison officers will join two that arrived August 3 to work with U.S. fire officials. The specialists will receive two days of orientation beginning Saturday, and will be assigned to fires the first of next week.

“In an active fire season, these mid-level fireline management roles are most difficult for us to fill,” said Tom Frey, International Program manager at NIFC. “The Australians and New Zealanders come to us trained and highly-qualified. They use a command system very similar to ours, and their training and fitness requirements are much like ours. It’s a good fit for everyone.”

Primary U.S. firefighting resources have been stretched thin by a long and active fire season this year. The convergence of hot temperatures, dry fuel conditions, and lightning storms has resulted in a high number of fire starts and severe large fire activity from northern California, across the Pacific Northwest, Nevada, Idaho, and Montana.

The United States, Australia, and New Zealand have a long-standing partnership in sharing firefighting resources. This will be the fourth time since 2000 the two countries have provided assistance during U.S. fire seasons. In January 2003, during the peak of the Australian fire season, a contingent of U.S. fire specialists was sent to the state of Victoria for a month. In the past, NIFC has called on Canadian firefighters as well, but due to a severe fire season in areas such as British Columbia, Canadian personnel are unavailable.

“We value the expertise and experience that the fire specialist from Australia and New Zealand bring,” Frey said. “They come with the skills we need at a time when we need them.”

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